

Claims:

1. A method for tenderizing meat, said method comprising contacting meat with a tenderizing-effective amount of a thermolabile protease.
2. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein said protease has a limited substrate specificity.
3. A method as defined in claim 2, wherein said protease is derived from a mammal.
4. A method as defined in claim 3, wherein said mammal is bovine.
5. A method as defined in claim 3, wherein said protease is chymosin.
6. A method as defined in claim 5, wherein said protease is obtained from a recombinant host cell transformed with a nucleic acid encoding said protease.
7. A method as defined in claim 3, wherein said meat after tenderization exhibits a relative shear force of between about 50% and about 90% of said meat prior to tenderization.
8. A method as defined in claim 7, wherein said meat after tenderization exhibits a relative shear force of between about 60% and about 80% of said meat prior to tenderization.
9. A method as defined in claim 3, wherein said contacting comprises injection or marination.
10. A method as defined in claim 10, further comprising tumbling said meat.

11. A method as defined in claim 3, wherein said meat is contacted with said protease at a ratio of between about 0.001 and about 0.05 AU/g meat.

12. A method as defined in claim 3, wherein said meat is selected from the group consisting of fresh meat, frozen meat, freeze-dried meat, and restructured meat.

13. A tenderized meat product obtained using a method as defined in claim 1.

14. A tenderized meat product obtained using a method as defined in claim 5.

15. A tenderizing meat composition comprising a tenderizing-effective amount of (i) a thermolabile protease, wherein said protease is derived from a mammal; and (ii) one or more flavoring agents..

16. A composition as defined in claim 15, wherein said protease has a limited substrate specificity.

17. A composition as defined in claim 16, wherein said protease is bovine chymosin.

18. A composition as defined in claim 15, further comprising brine and/or a curing agent.

19. A composition as defined in claim 15, wherein said flavoring agent is selected from the group consisting of herbs, spices, liquid smoke, and combinations of any of the foregoing.

20. A tenderizing meat composition comprising (i) a tenderizing-effective amount of bovine chymosin and (ii) a nitrite.